

**IN THE CLAIMS**

1. (Currently Amended) A method of forming a preform for a muffler having a predetermined shape comprising the steps of:

texturizing glass strands by separating said glass strands into individual glass fibers prior to feeding said glass fibers into a preform mold;[.]

feeding powdered or granulated sugar and said glass fibers into said preform mold;

heating said preform mold to a temperature sufficient to melt said sugar, said melted sugar adhering to said glass fibers to form sugar-coated glass fibers; and

cooling said preform mold to bind said sugar-coated glass fibers together and form said preform,

wherein said preform includes said sugar in an amount from about 2 to about 10% by weight of said preform.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said glass fibers are continuous glass strands.

3. (Canceled)

4. (Original) The method of claim 2, wherein said continuous glass strands and said sugar are simultaneously fed into said preform mold.

5. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein said predetermined shape of said preform mold has a shape corresponding to a shape of an automobile muffler.

6. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:  
removing said preform from said preform mold.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said sugar is a sugar having a melting point of 130 °F or greater.

8. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said preform mold is perforated.

9. (Original) The method of claim 8, wherein said heating step comprises passing heated air through said preform mold for a period of time sufficient to at least partially caramelize said sugar.

10. (Original) The method of claim 8, wherein said cooling step comprises passing cool air through said preform mold.
11. (Currently Amended) A method of forming a preform comprising the steps of:  
placing a binder on internal walls of a preform mold prior to feeding one or more adding continuous glass-strands of glass fibers to said preform mold;  
feeding adding said one or more continuous glass-strands of glass fibers to said preform mold;  
and  
curing said binder to bond glass fibers positioned adjacent to said internal walls of said preform mold together and form said preform, said bonded glass fibers forming an encapsulating shell of glass fibers bonded by said binder, said bonded glass fibers surrounding internal, unbonded glass fibers not bonded by said binder within said preform.
12. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 11, wherein said binder is a sugar, said sugar having has a melting point of 130 °F or greater.
13. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 12, wherein said curing step comprises the steps of:  
heating said preform mold to a temperature sufficient to at least partially melt said sugar, said melted sugar adhering to said glass fibers adjacent to said internal walls to form sugar-coated glass fibers; and  
cooling said preform mold to bind said sugar-coated glass fibers together and form said preform.
14. (Original) The method of claim 13, further comprising the step of:  
heating said preform mold prior to placing said sugar on said internal walls.
15. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 11, further comprising the step of:  
texturizing said one or more continuous glass strands of glass fibers by separating said one or more continuous glass-strands of glass fibers into individual glass fibers prior to feeding said one or more continuous glass-strands of glass fibers into said preform mold.
16. (Original) The method of claim 11, further comprising the step of:  
removing said preform from said preform mold.

17.-20. (Canceled)

21. (Currently Amended) A method of forming a preform for a muffler having a predetermined shape comprising the steps of:

feeding powdered or granulated sugar and glass fibers into a preform mold;  
heating said preform mold to a temperature sufficient to melt said sugar, said melted sugar adhering to said glass fibers to form sugar-coated glass fibers; and  
cooling said preform mold to bind said sugar-coated glass fibers together and form said preform,  
wherein said preform includes said sugar in an amount of approximately 2 - 10% by weight of said preform.

22. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 21, wherein said glass fibers and said sugar are simultaneously fed into said preform mold.

23. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 21, wherein said sugar is a sugar having a melting point of 130 °F or greater.

24. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 21, wherein said glass fibers are continuous glass strands.

25. (Canceled)

26. (New) The method of claim 11, wherein said binder is selected from the group consisting of a molten sugar and a sugar solution.